ERIC Document Resume	See Instruction Sheet	DATE OF RESUME 8/8/65	DATE RECEIVED

1. PUBLICATION DATA

ERIC ACCESSION NUMBER: ED001637

2. ORIGINATOR CONTROL NO(S). N.A.

3. IDENTIFICATION NO. N.A.

DO NOT WRITE IN SPACE BELOW

4. AUTHOR(S): School District of Philadelphia

5. TITLE OF DOCUMENT ABSTRACTED: School Failure - A Summary of Research Findings

MICROFILM COPY AVAILABLE YES ☒ NO ☐

COPYRIGHT GRANTED YES ☐ NO ☒

COPYRIGHT RELEASE FILED YES ☐ NO ☐

6. PUBLICATION TITLE: N.A.

7. EDITOR(S): N.A.

8. PLACE OF ORIGIN: School District of Philadelphia
ORG. Philadelphia, Pa.
CITY, STATE

TYPE OF REPORT
PROPOSAL ☐
IN-PROGRESS ☐
FINAL ☒
FOLLOW-UP ☐

9. PUBLISHER OR SOURCE: School District of Philadelphia Department of Superintendence

10. VOL.	11. PAGES	12. MO./YR.	13. TOTAL PP.
N.A.	N.A.	5/65	11

TELE. EXT.
INST/LOC CODE

OTHER ERIC REFERENCES:

ERIC SATELLITE CODE

13. INDEXING DATA

14. SUBJECT AREA

15. TYPE OF ENDEAVOR: research report

16. INDEXING TERMS (6-12)

juvenile delinquency	grade repetion	family life	Philadelphia,	Pa.
school failures	student attitudes	motivation		
retardation	grade standards	ability levels		
		personality factors		

17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

Grade repetition, particularly in the early grades, not only fails to help the majority of pupils academically, but, in many cases, creates additional problems. Factors involved in a student's failure vary from school to school.

The major problems of grade repetition are that the student is older and larger than his classmates; and that his ability, including his learning rate, is generally below the class average.

Several studies have revealed definite relationships between school retardation and delinquency. For youth who have already experienced a poor family life, school failure may provoke resentment.

Yet in particular situations in the senior high school and vocational programs, arbitrary minimum standards must be set for some skills to protect life or to meet specific career demands.

ERIC No.

18. SOURCE OF ABSTRACT

C. FUNDING DATA

19. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION

20. DIVISION OR DEPT.

21. CONTRACT NO.

PROJECT NO.

22. TOTAL COST OF PROJECT

23. DURATION OR PROJECT

U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
Office of Education

ERIC Form 1

EDU01637

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA, DEPARTMENT OF SUPERINTENDENCE

Bulletin 586

Division of Educational Research

SCHOOL FAILURE - A SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

May 20, 1965

Philadelphia

It is frequently stated that repeating a grade, particularly one of the early grades, will establish better foundations upon which to build future school progress.

However, there is considerable research which indicates that, generally speaking, this result is not obtained. Furthermore, research indicates that not only does grade repetition fail to help the majority of pupils academically, but in many cases it actually creates additional problems.

CAUSES OF FAILURE

When a pupil is left back, except for an unusual amount of absence, the failure depends almost entirely on some combination of the factors listed below, most of which are not within the control of the child or his parents:

the scholastic ability of the pupil (This includes his learning rate and his ability to comprehend complex ideas and retain them for future use. While this ability can be changed, sometimes radically, by a change in the pupil's environment, there is little that he himself can do about it. Furthermore, this low scholastic ability is frequently associated with transiency, and very poor family, neighborhood, and financial conditions, about which, again, the pupil can do very little. For most school subjects this "ability" can be expressed roughly by an IQ that is heavily weighted with verbal concepts.)

the sex of the pupil (Retardation rates for boys are nearly twice those for girls.)

the philosophy of the school (In recent years this factor, especially in elementary schools, has become more important.)

REPRINTED BY PERMISSION
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN PRINTED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

the level of difficulty of the instructional material of the course in which the pupil has been enrolled (more important in secondary schools)

the cumulative effect of prior failures

the amount of effort on the part of the pupil

One study, involving nearly 1000 eighth grade pupils, indicated the extent to which the rate of progress can be related to the IQ under conditions of relatively heavy failure rates. The table below shows the number of skipped grade-sections or repeated grade-sections for pupils at each of the following IQ levels:

IQ	AVERAGE RATE OF PROGRESS
132	skipped three terms (half years)
128	" two "
122	" one term
111	normal progress
104	repeated one term
93	" two terms
84	" three "
77	" four "
72	" five "
69	" six "
67	" seven "

In this particular study, the third factor listed on page 1, "the philosophy of the school," had little effect, since all the schools involved had about the same philosophy of promotion. It was found that the IQ of the pupil was more important, in 95 percent of the cases, than all other factors combined. No other factor, including lack of effort, could be found that had anything like as much effect as the pupil's scholastic ability.

A similar study, covering grades 1 to 12, showed the average IQ for each rate of progress.

RATE OF PROGRESS	AVERAGE IQ
Accelerated one year	132
Regular progress	112
Retarded one year	97
Retarded two years	90

EFFECT OF REPETITION

"What Research Says to the Teacher," by J. Wayne Wrightstone, published in May 1957, states:

> "For a time, classroom teachers and school administrators practiced nonpromotion of slow learners in an attempt to achieve homogeneity in class performance. Research on nonpromotion over the past 40 years has shown that it is generally ineffective....
>
> "Homogeneity within a grade is not attained by nonpromotion. Several studies have shown as large a range of achievement in subject-matter for schools using high nonpromotion rates as for schools in which nonpromotion rates are low....
>
> "Children at any ability level do not learn more by repeating a grade. Actually, most of them make less progress in learning subject-matter than if they are promoted to the next grade...."

Five Philadelphia studies compared schools with a consistent pattern of low failure rates with comparable schools in similar neighborhoods with consistent patterns of higher failure rates. The amount of learning that took place per year was slightly higher in the low-failure-rate schools. (Research Bulletin 245)

Another Philadelphia study traced the growth in achievement and the change in behavior patterns of 400 elementary school pupils for three years after they were left back for the first time in January 1944. After repeating a grade-section some pupils were doing a little better three years later, some not quite as well. There tended to be more losses than gains. It was impossible to determine in advance which pupils would do better.

Several studies have shown that for any subsequent repetition, the chances of any beneficial effect practically disappear.

There are four factors to be considered in any study of what happens when a pupil repeats a grade. (1) His educational age is now closer to the class average. (2) In chronological age, he is now one year older than most of his classmates. (3) His ability, including his learning rate, is still just as

far below the average of his class. (4) The fourth basic learning factor may be called spirit, effort, hope, interest, stick-to-itiveness. Within reasonable limits this last, hard-to-define, factor is often the most decisive. It is this factor that is often damaged when a pupil is left back. The net result, in the majority of cases, is somewhat worse.

A study was made of a group of newly-entered high school pupils, selected as the most difficult to interest in any kind of learning activity. With two or three exceptions, all had repeated grades in elementary or junior high school. Most of them had repeated two or more terms. Apparently, all of these prior repetitions had not helped much.

The problem of grade failure affects more boys than girls, and the consequences are frequently more serious. One study (Research Bulletin 575) showed that very few boys dropped out before reaching graduation unless they had repeated one or more grade-sections. In many cases, whether or not they had repeated depended more on the promotion practices of the schools they had attended than on the actual levels of achievement of the boys themselves. For example, twenty of the contributing elementary schools had failure rates that averaged more than seven times the failure rates of twenty other, comparable, elementary schools.

Percent of dropouts who had had one or more repetitions	94
Percent of dropouts who had never repeated a grade	6

Boys who did not repeat grades and were thus not overage, did not, with few exceptions, drop out of school before reaching graduation. Of the boys who did not repeat any grade-section, 90 percent remained to graduation. Of those who repeated, only 25 percent reached graduation.

Retardation in elementary and junior high schools is sometimes so extensive that boys are nearly sixteen before they reach the tenth grade. They have had a history of failure and it is unlikely that they expect anything else in senior or technical high school. After some initial failures, they begin to mark time to their sixteenth birthday. Then they get some kind of a job and hold it long enough to get out of school. Their school experience in the lower grades has made it very difficult for the upper grade teachers to make any kind of adjustment that will reach these pupils.

The effect of grade failure is cumulative. One study (174 cases, September 1957) of pupils with a history of one or more repetitions in earlier grades showed that for every hundred pupils repeating grade 10A the following happened:

39 dropped out of school during the second term in 10A
15 " " " " " " third " " 10A
7 " " " " " " fourth " " 10A
36 " " " " in grades above 10A
3 remained to graduation

RETARDATION AND DELINQUENCY

In 1941 an intensive study was undertaken of approximately 100 boys assigned, because of truancy, to the Shallcross School. Without exception they came from home conditions that were intolerable to them. However, they were all truants from school, which meant that they did not regard school as at least a temporary refuge. More than 90 percent of them had repeated grades, usually at a fairly early age before they had become truants. Had these boys attended some other elementary schools which had lower failure rates, it is quite possible that many of them would not have repeated these grades. It is difficult to believe that they would have attended Shallcross either.

By tracing the school records of the Philadelphia boys committed to penal or correctional institutions during a two-month period some years ago, it was found that over 90 percent of the group of approximately 100 boys had records of being left back in one or more grades.

One impressive study[1] of 500 delinquent boys showed the close relationship between verbal ability and delinquency. The average verbal IQ of these boys was 88.6, compared to a presumable average of something more than 100 for the remainder of the pupils in the total city population. Since verbal ability is not the only factor closely related to delinquency, it was possible to find 500 control boys who were almost as low in verbal IQ (92.0) who were not delinquent.

The study indicated that, among other traits, the delinquent boys tended to be more adventuresome, aggressive, belligerent, hostile, and resentful than the nondelinquent boys. Also, more than the nondelinquents, they tended to have a predominantly mesomorphic (muscular) body type, a type that is sometimes described as a "fighter" build. Sheldon[2] has indicated that there is a fairly close relationship between this body type and the personality traits mentioned above.

The delinquents tended, in greater proportion, to come from homes that lacked stability, family cohesiveness, self-respect, good conduct standards, and affection - from homes in which discord and resentment were more frequent. It is probable that the interaction of the mental, emotional, and physical characteristics of the boy with the characteristics of the home did not help matters.

---

(1) Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency, Harvard University Press, 1950

(2) W. H. Sheldon, The Varieties of Temperament, Harper and Brothers, 1942, and also Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, Physique and Delinquency, Harper and Brothers, 1956

The boys brought all these problems with them when they entered school. Most of them were left back by the seventh grade. The first table on page 2 shows that the average pupil with an IQ of 88.6 might be expected to repeat about one year, or a little more. The average years of repetition was 1.7 for the 500 delinquents and 1.1 for the 500 nondelinquents. Presumably the greatest number of failures occurred in the earlier grades. For the average boy, his first record of misbehavior in school occurred in grade four.

For boys of the temperament described above, failure is very hard to take, resentment very easy to stir up. Their ratings on "dislike of school" and on truancy were very much higher than those of the nondelinquent boys, who also had low IQ's and who had repeated almost as many grades.

No one can say, without further experimentation, just how much each factor, IQ, body build, temperament, family life, or being left back in school, plays in the making of a delinquent. It has been claimed that it takes at least two or three such factors to make a full-blown delinquent. We only know that grade failure, which usually precedes the first record of misbehavior in school, is nearly always present in the history of a delinquent. It is the only one of these factors that is very much, if at all, within the school's control.

It would be very difficult to explain all of the facts that have been related here without assuming that there must be some degree of a "cause and effect" relationship between being left back and delinquency. Two statements expressing this belief, one from a director of research and the other from an intensive study of criminals, give logical reasons for this belief.

Wrightstone says:

> "Nonpromotion affects the personality of the pupil unfavorably. Clinical studies of children who have failed show that there is a loss of self-confidence. Self-respect is undermined. The feeling of security, so necessary to mental health, is usually weakened and feelings of inferiority are increased."

In "What Makes a Criminal," printed in Life Magazine, October 7, 1957, the following statements occur:

> " 'For all our advances in education,' one criminologist has said, 'our teachers today still pin medals on the bright kids.' In a psychiatrically well-run world this would never happen. The bright student usually has not only a good brain but a reasonably happy and stable family background. He needs no further help or praise. The backward student probably is suffering as much from trouble at home as from poor mentality. He needs whatever help, reassurance and sympathy he can get. He goes to school full of all the family tensions. Because his mind is elsewhere, he starts to fall behind....
>
> "Such a boy, unwanted at home, a dismal failure at school, has to find some kind of success to satisfy his very human yearnings for prestige. Usually he finds it by getting into trouble."

SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although all available major research findings indicate that grade repetition tends, in most cases, to do more harm than good, are there not instances in which failure in certain subjects can logically be defended?

At the senior high and technical high levels there are certain skills where arbitrary minimum standards must be set to protect life or to meet specific career demands.

There can be no compromise where externally imposed minimum standards of skill or proficiency are involved. The protection of life and limb is concerned in auto mechanics, driver education, engineering, medicine. Society sets minimum standards for state certification, or for employment, in law, stenography, electronics, commercial art, bricklaying. It would be either dangerous or misleading to label as "satisfactory" any performance in these areas that did not meet minimum standards, no matter how often the work had to be repeated.

But, there are comparatively few areas in which certain of the less complex elements cannot be presented in a way that will help the low-achieving pupil toward his goal of a more satisfying life, and help society towards its goal of producing more effective and useful citizens. These values can be found in nearly every area of science, mathematics, manual skills, English, languages, art, music, physical education, typing, social studies.

In secondary schools, no matter how effective the guidance program may be, there will always be some insufficiently able pupils who will attempt work in an area where even minimum passing standards cannot be compromised.

It is possible that failure in the high school years is less serious from the standpoint of personality development than is failure in the earlier formative years of the elementary school.

While there is no valid reason for not adjusting minimum passing standards to the ability of individual pupils in most subjects, there will always remain a few upper-grade pupils who have so lost interest in school that even the best teacher could not stimulate them to reach a standard that is well within their ability to attain.

The schools are charged by the State with the responsibility of providing an education for pupils to the age of seventeen. The Downs report, November 1947, proposes that the senior high schools provide this education "for the age range usually served by these schools," and that pupils completing high school "after meeting reasonable requirements of subject matter adjusted to varying abilities," be given a diploma and a transcript of their school records. This implies that attainable standards, in areas of instruction suited to their abilities, should be set for all pupils.

The needs of higher education impose limitations on the higher marks. There cannot be any compromise in the giving of marks of C or above in subjects that might be used for college certification. For example, while it might be desirable to give more mathematics and science to a large proportion of boys who are not college material, their marks could not be C or above unless actually earned. But the existing directives clearly state that the mark of D (just barely passing) can be adjusted to the ability of the pupil.

SUMMARY - WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A PUPIL IS LEFT BACK

Behind statistics there are people, possibly Paul and Fred.

Paul and Fred are as like in ability and temperament as two peas in a pod. Their neighborhood environments and their homes are comparable. Their schools and classes are comparable. Both are finishing the fourth grade. Both have learning rates and levels of achievement that are far below the class average. At the end of the year in June, Paul is passed but Fred is failed.

In the fall, Paul, in grade five, is still as far behind in learning rate and in levels of achievement as he was the year before. Each year he will fall still further below the average in his levels of achievement.

Fred, at the beginning of the year in his new grade four class, is not as far below the class level in achievement as he was the year before. But he is still just as far below in his ability to handle complex ideas. His learning rate has not changed. As the months and years go by, the average pupils will pull further and further away. Fred is about a year older than most of his classmates. He is larger and stronger.

After three years, Paul is finishing grade seven, Fred grade six. If each boy were given identical subject-matter tests, Paul would score just as high as Fred, perhaps a shade higher. Paul's conduct and work habits would be better.

After both boys have spent ten years in school, Paul is entering grade eleven and Fred is entering grade ten. Both boys are still far below average in learning rate and far below the average pupil in levels of achievement in their respective grades. Both will require a subject-matter environment that has been planned to call forth their best efforts, one in which they are able to be at least partially successful.

At the time each boy reached grade ten, he needed special guidance, as he had needed it in prior years. Each needed a subject-matter environment that was appropriate to his ability. Both were slow learners. Fred, who had repeated a grade, was one year older than Paul when he reached grade ten. Since Fred had had one more year of schooling by the time he reached grade ten, his level of schievement in school subjects was slightly higher than Paul's had been.

But Paul, who is now entering grade eleven, has learned a little more and his behavior and work habits are better.

At age seventeen, Paul is in grade twelve. Fred has dropped out of school.

DAVID A. HOROWITZ
Associate Superintendent

W. WALKER CHEYNEY
Director